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EPA Mid-Atlantic Region Headlines

Friday, December 15, 2017

*** DAILY HOT LIST ***

Bay water quality nears record high mark

CHESAPEAKE BAY JOURNAL Officials see signs cleanup is working, but most of Chesapeake still short of goal. Water quality in a little more than 39 percent of the Chesapeake maintained levels good enough during the last three years to support Bay creatures, from worms to crabs to fish, figures released Thursday show. That was the second-best extent of good water quality seen in any three-year period since coordinated Chesapeake monitoring efforts began in 1985, according to the state-federal Bay Program partnership. From 2014 through last year, 39.2 percent of the Bay attained clean water standards for clarity, algae concentrations and dissolved oxygen. That was just below the record-best extent in 2008-2010, when 39.5 percent of the Chesapeake met cleanup goals. Officials said the numbers show that decades-long cleanup efforts have improved conditions in recent years, including a record-high abundance of underwater grasses, a key indicator of the estuary's health. Still, Bay Program officials and environmental advocates alike noted that the latest figures show that 60 percent of the Bay falls short of water quality objectives. "While these improving trends are encouraging, we must ramp up our efforts to implement pollution control measures to ensure progress toward 100 percent of the water-quality standards is achieved throughout the Bay and its tidal waters," said Nick DiPasquale, director of the Environmental Protection Agency's Bay Program Office. The water-quality standards are designed to ensure that Bay dwelling creatures — from bottom-dwelling worms to striped bass swimming along the surface — have enough oxygen to survive. They're also intended to bring back clear water that would allow the recovery of the Bay's once-vast underwater grass meadows, which provide habitat for juvenile fish and crabs and food for waterfowl. Meeting the standards would also curb growth of algae blooms that often plague the Bay, some of them harmful, even toxic, to fish and animals... The data suggest there has been a significant overall improvement in Bay water quality since monitoring efforts began in 1985. In the first three-year assessment from 1985-87, just 26.5 percent of the Chesapeake attained water quality standards. "Robust funding, science, and stewardship are paying off and cleaning up the Bay, but we still have a long way to go," said Ben Grumbles, secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment.

DEP to target other air pollutants to get at methane from existing shale wells

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania's first step toward cutting emissions of methane from thousands of existing shale gas wells will not target the greenhouse gas directly. Instead, the state Department of Environmental Protection is planning to implement federal guidelines for cutting smog-causing pollutants that will, as a side benefit, reduce methane escaping from some types of well site equipment, according to concepts the agency outlined at an advisory meeting on Thursday. The strategy has frustrated environmental groups who are concerned that it will leave many sources of methane leaks at current well sites unchecked, especially in regions of the state where gas from the Marcellus Shale carries too little of the smog-forming volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, to trigger the proposed controls. "Focusing only on the VOC element puts Pennsylvania not only significantly behind other leading natural gas-producing states but also leaves a big swath of the emissions mix on the table," Andrew Williams, a regulatory affairs director with the Environmental Defense Fund, said. Gov. Tom Wolf laid out a strategy in 2016 for curbing methane emissions across the state's shale gas industry, including new wells, existing wells and pipelines. Permits to address emissions from future wells and other infrastructure are expected to be published in the first quarter of 2018, but regulations for existing sources have been slower to develop. Methane is a more powerful but shorter-lived greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide and minimizing leaks is seen as crucial to realizing the climate benefits of using natural gas instead of fuels like coal. Nearly 7,000 shale wells ...

Senate Gives EPA Water Office a Permanent Leader

BNA DAILY ENVIRONMENT REPORT The Trump administration's pick to be the country's top water quality regulator has won Senate confirmation. The Senate in a Dec. 14 voice vote confirmed David Ross to lead the Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water, which has jurisdiction over oceans, rivers, lakes, tap water, and other areas. He will be the first permanent leader the office has had since 2014, as the Obama administration's nominee, Ken Kopocis, was never confirmed. Ross was most recently the top environmental official in the office of the Wisconsin attorney general. He will lead the agency's rewrite of its Waters of the United States rule, which redefines the bodies of water that fall under federal anti-pollution jurisdiction. He will also be in charge of the agency's ongoing response to the Flint, Mich., lead contamination crisis. The Senate also confirmed, by voice vote, Matt Leopold to be the agency's general counsel. He served as the general counsel to Florida's Department of Environmental Protection from 2013 to 2015 under Republican Gov. Rick Scott. Leopold also is a former Justice Department environmental attorney, whose resume includes work on the civil trial team for the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Leopold will lead the EPA's legal team as it works to secure the legal underpinning for repealing, replacing, and rewriting Obama-era climate, water, and air policies. Most recently, he worked as a partner in Carlton Fields Jorden Burt's Tallahassee, Fla., office.

The Environment and Public Works Committee approved both nominations by voice vote Oct. 25.

Trump environmental officials are keeping tight rein over stampede of FOIA requests

WASHINGTON POST The Trump administration's top environmental policymakers are engaged in a new war with their adversaries — over how much information to release to the media and outside groups, who are often perceived as enemies, as part of a heavy stream of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The Environmental Protection Agency and Interior Department are at ground zero in this growing feud. At both departments and elsewhere in the administration, news outlets and nonprofit organizations have uncovered meeting schedules and travel manifests through FOIA requests that illustrate the ties top officials have forged with players in industries they are tasked with regulating. FOIA requests have also shed light on EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's taxpayer-funded travel habits. The result is that some high-level officials at both EPA and Interior are keeping closer tabs on these FOIA requests, while at least at the EPA — according to those who have filed such requests — bureaus drag their feet in responding...

How a trash incinerator — Baltimore's biggest polluter — became green energy

BALTIMORE SUN A trash incinerator in Southwest Baltimore is the city's largest single source of air pollution. But a state law has nonetheless allowed it to collect roughly \$10 million in subsidies over the past six years through a program intended to promote green energy. Few commuters who pass the imposing white smokestack on Interstate 95 have any idea that the plant burns their household waste, that their electric bills help to maintain it, or that it releases thousands of pounds of greenhouse gases and toxic substances — carbon dioxide, hydrochloric acid, formaldehyde among them — into the air every year. Wheelabrator Baltimore gets the subsidies because lawmakers agreed in 2011 to classify trash as one of the most environmentally friendly sources of renewable power, on par with wind energy. The waste-to-energy industry helped write the legislation that awarded it the coveted renewable label that qualifies incinerators for the subsidies. Maryland is one of fewer than a dozen states to reward trash-burning in the same way as it does windmills. Critics say that's just one example of how Maryland's renewable energy incentive program is like the federal tax code: It's full of breaks and handouts that might have made sense at one time, but have now grown out of control. Some also question whether burning black liquor — a waste product from paper mills — should qualify as renewable energy eligible for money under the program. A paper mill in Western Maryland and others across the Southeastern United States have collected \$60 million dollars from Maryland's electricity ratepayers. While there is broad support in Maryland and other states for building a clean and renewable energy supply, the debate shows disagreement over how to get there. Politicians generally support efforts to reduce the fossil fuel emissions that are causing the climate to change. But they have been unable to come to a consensus on just what should be counted as green energy. State Del. Jeff Waldstreicher has sponsored legislation to stop rewarding renewable but dirty fuels and focus on truly green energy. "Each of these elements individually was well-intentioned when it was put in the renewable portfolio standard," the Montgomery County Democrat says. "Cumulatively, we see it might not be as renewable as we originally

thought.”...

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Snow? Again? 1-3 inches possible for homebound commute Yet again, snow is in the forecast. The National Weather Service is calling for 1-3 inches in the Philadelphia area. Winter is still a week away. One remarkable aspect of this winter is that as far as the solar system is concerned, it's not even winter yet. That technicality aside, the National Weather Service has posted another “winter weather advisory” for 1 to 3 inches of snow in the immediate Philadelphia area — more possible in South Jersey — that would arrive in time for the Friday afternoon commute. If that does happen, it would be the third officially measurable snow in Philadelphia in a week, and in coming so early that would constitute a rarity, if not a precedent. We've already noted that the 4.1 inches on Saturday qualified as unusual; a snowfall of 4 inches or more has occurred before Dec. 10 on only four other times in the last 50 years. Historically, all White Christmas mythology aside, December is not a particularly snowy month around here, for a variety of reasons. For one thing, the aforementioned solstice comes late in the month, and with the lag in solar effects on the earth's surface, the coldest period usually doesn't come for three or four weeks, just as the peak summer heat doesn't hit until July. Another big factor is the Atlantic Ocean, which cools way more slowly than land masses. Our snow often comes from coastal storms that generate onshore winds that bring in warmer air from the ocean, where water temperatures are well into the 40s. For now at least, the atmosphere evidently is in snow mode. The source of Friday's threat is one of those coastal lows, this one probably too weak to draw in warm air, but just strong enough to throw back some snow. And winter arrives officially next week, on Thursday.

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

DEP to target other air pollutants to get at methane from existing shale wells HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania's first step toward cutting emissions of methane from thousands of existing shale gas wells will not target the greenhouse gas directly. Instead, the state Department of Environmental Protection is planning to implement federal guidelines for cutting smog-causing pollutants that will, as a side benefit, reduce methane escaping from some types of well site equipment, according to concepts the agency outlined at an advisory meeting on Thursday. The strategy has frustrated environmental groups who are concerned that it will leave many sources of methane leaks at current well sites unchecked, especially in regions of the state where gas from the Marcellus Shale carries too little of the smog-forming volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, to trigger the proposed controls. “Focusing only on the VOC element puts Pennsylvania not only significantly behind other leading natural gas-producing states but also leaves a big swath of the emissions mix on the table,” Andrew Williams, a regulatory affairs director with the Environmental Defense Fund, said. Gov. Tom Wolf laid out a strategy in 2016 for curbing methane emissions across the state's shale gas industry, including new wells, existing wells and pipelines. Permits to address emissions from future wells and other infrastructure are expected to be published in the first quarter of 2018, but regulations for existing sources have been slower to develop. Methane is a more powerful but shorter-lived greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide and

minimizing leaks is seen as crucial to realizing the climate benefits of using natural gas instead of fuels like coal. Nearly 7,000 shale wells ...

Monroeville approves seismic testing settlement Seismic testing on Monroeville roads will be allowed within 50 feet of a structure, instead of 100 feet as the municipality had wanted, under a settlement approved by Monroeville council. The settlement agreement, which council voted unanimously Tuesday to ratify, was met with criticism by some. “Everybody in Monroeville is vulnerable to the seismic testing” under the settlement, resident Adrienne Weiss told council Tuesday. She said the municipality was “selling out” the residents of Monroeville for not fighting the court case against Geokenetics, a Texas-based company. “The bottom line was we have to follow the law,” Mayor Greg Erosenko said. Seismic testing is typically conducted using trucks that pound the ground with heavy steel plates, causing vibrations that allow sensors to chart underground rock formations, such as the *Marcellus Shale*. Sometimes explosive charges are set off in holes. Geokinetics had come to council in June with a proposal to conduct ...

What's in the sky in Pittsburgh? It's time for the annual Christmas Bird Count During the first week of last year's Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, a major winter storm blanketed two-thirds of North America. Although many amateur birders cancelled count plans, and many birds took cover to avoid the weather, data was collected by 76,669 observers, setting a new participation record.

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE REVIEW

Westmoreland Transit Fueling Growing Fleet Of Natural Gas Buses The only thing holding up the use of six new natural gas-fueled buses by the Westmoreland County Transit Authority is a license plate. The gleaming 57-seat buses stand ready to replace six older, diesel vehicles now that a compressed natural gas, or CNG, fueling station is online. The transit authority held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday to officially open the station. Local dignitaries watched as a technician filled up one of the new MCI Commuter Coach buses with the CNG fuel. “This gives us the opportunity to capitalize on the abundance of natural gas right here in Western Pennsylvania,” said Frank Tosto, transit authority board chairman. “The fuel is literally underfoot.” Transit authority Executive Director Alan Blahovec said the buses will be put into service within a week, once the license plates arrive. Although passengers will hardly notice a difference, the benefits of natural gas over diesel are threefold — a lower noise level, greater fuel efficiency and environmental improvements, he said...

STATE IMPACT PENNSYLVANIA

Congressman Meehan seeks pipeline risk assessment for Mariner East 2 Responding to landowners' concerns regarding pipeline construction in Delaware and Chester counties, suburban Philadelphia Congressman Pat Meehan (R-7) has asked Gov. Tom Wolf to conduct a risk assessment of Sunoco's Mariner East 2 pipeline. In a letter to Wolf on Dec. 12, Meehan wrote “a risk assessment would be a welcome and responsible step in providing residents with the information they need to better understand the construction and operation of this pipeline...” The Mariner East 2 pipeline received its permits from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection in February 2016, after the company failed several attempts to produce completed applications and was repeatedly sent back to the drawing board by DEP. Critics said the permits issued by the administration did not meet standards set by the DEP. The construction

along the 350-mile pipeline that would carry natural gas liquids has since been plagued with problems, including dozens of drilling mud spills. In one case the construction ruined an aquifer in a Chester County community. The pipeline project also resulted in 552,000 gallons of bentonite mud spilled into LeTort Spring Run, an Exceptional Value wetland in Cumberland County. Bentonite is non-toxic, but in large amounts can smother aquatic life. Sunoco, DEP and several environmental organizations agreed to a settlement in July, approved by Judge Bernard Labuskes of the Environmental Hearing Board. Drilling resumed in August after Sunoco agreed to a series of water-protection measures including stronger oversight by the DEP. But official data and local reports indicate that water issues have continued in some locations...

LANCASTER NEWSPAPERS

Editorial: Masonic Village Taking Lead On Solar Power THE ISSUE - Masonic Village in Elizabethtown will soon produce more solar power than any other retirement community in the nation, LNP reported Monday. Masonic Village is tripling its solar power capability by expanding on an undeveloped hillside between Freemason Drive and Eden View Road, and adding a 1.98-megawatt system to a 1-megawatt installation done in 2011, LNP's Tim Mekeel reported. The new system costs \$2.3 million, according to a building permit issued by West Donegal Township...

WILKES-BARRE CITIZENS VOICE

Harveys Lake gets state grant to eradicate invasive hydrilla HARVEYS LAKE — A state grant of more than \$208,000 will help Harveys Lake continue work to eliminate an invasive aquatic plant from the lake. The borough earned a \$208,870 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Growing Greener program to help eradicate the invasive hydrilla. Thick mats of the plant have taken root in the lake, which can clog boat propellers. In other aquatic settings, the plant can reduce irrigation rates or clog intake pipes and filters in hydroelectric power plants. The pernicious plant spreads vigorously. It is found in at least 21 states. "Even the smallest living plant fragment can float downstream and form a new plant," according to the organization Pennsylvania Sea Grant. That makes it easy for bits of hydrilla stuck on boat motors, trailers or in bait buckets to start new infestations elsewhere. The borough plans to apply for permits that will allow it to complete a treatment in 2018. Harveys Lake has contracted with Princeton Hydro, an environmental and engineering firm based in Ringoes, N.J., to complete herbicide treatments in the past. The borough completed a small treatment in 2015 near the part of the lake where Harveys Creek begins. Another treatment at the end of 2017 hit the area near the boat launch. Future work will likely continue where that treatment ended. The borough's goal is to completely eradicate the plant from its waters, but that could take three to five years, said councilwoman Michell'e Boice. "We've had success with the two treatments thus far, but it's a big lake, a deep lake," she said. "That's why it's going to take that long."...

WASHINGTON, D.C.

WASHINGTON POST

Trump environmental officials are keeping tight rein over stampede of FOIA requests The Trump administration's top environmental policymakers are engaged in a new war with their

adversaries — over how much information to release to the media and outside groups, who are often perceived as enemies, as part of a heavy stream of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The Environmental Protection Agency and Interior Department are at ground zero in this growing feud. At both departments and elsewhere in the administration, news outlets and nonprofit organizations have uncovered meeting schedules and travel manifests through FOIA requests that illustrate the ties top officials have forged with players in industries they are tasked with regulating. FOIA requests have also shed light on EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's taxpayer-funded travel habits. The result is that some high-level officials at both EPA and Interior are keeping closer tabs on these FOIA requests, while at least at the EPA — according to those who have filed such requests — bureaus drag their feet in responding...

The Energy 202 Blog: Here are some environmental and energy items that survived the tax conference On Wednesday, members of the House and Senate emerged from conference committee with a compromise tax plan they are confident they can get through both chambers — and turn into President Trump's first major legislative accomplishment. "We are so close right now," President Trump said at the White House. "So close." GOP leaders have not revealed all the details of the tax code rewrite, The Post's Damian Paletta and Erica Werner report. But the top line is this: The bill "would lower the corporate tax rate to 21 percent beginning in 2018" and "would also lower the top tax rate for families and individuals from 39.6 percent to at least 37 percent, a change that would deliver a major tax cut for upper-income households." The tax plan, though, is in many ways much more than a tax plan. It has wide implications for energy policy in the United States. Here's what we know so far about what survived conference committee: Arctic refuge drilling stays: Given the presence of an Alaskan senator, Lisa Murkowski, on the conference committee, the provision of the tax bill that would allow drilling in a 1.5-million-acre coastal plain in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) unsurprisingly emerged unscathed from negotiations....

Smoke from wildfires may be surprisingly deadly, scientists report As firefighters continue to battle California's devastating Thomas Fire — now the fourth-largest in state history — a group of scientists presented new results suggesting that air pollution from such massive blazes may be one of their deadliest consequences. Speaking at the annual American Geophysical Union meeting in New Orleans, the researchers, from Colorado State University and the University of Houston, suggested Thursday that wildfires may be responsible for thousands of U.S. deaths annually due to the tiny pollution particles they put into the atmosphere. Moreover, just as fires are expected to worsen under climate warming, so might these health impacts...

WASHINGTON EXAMINER

EPA looks to keep lead out of drinking water The Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday it will seek input from state and local officials as it looks for ways to keep lead out of drinking water. The Lead and Copper Rule, established in 1991, requires water utilities to put anti-corrosion additives into water and set a nonenforceable goal of zero lead in drinking water. The EPA has invited state and local officials to agency headquarters in Washington for a Jan. 8 meeting as it considers changes to the rule, which has not been revised since its inception. Groups invited included the Environmental Council of States, the Council of State Governments, the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and others. "Despite lead-

contaminated sites being an environmental threat to our country, EPA has not updated the Lead and Copper Rule in decades,” EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in a statement. “In keeping with our commitment to cooperative federalism, EPA is seeking input from state stakeholders on proposed revisions to properly address lead and ensure communities have access to safe drinking water.” The EPA says it is considering potential revisions related to replacement of lead pipes and improving corrosion control treatment requirements. Pruitt has often cited improved water infrastructure and safe drinking water as a priority. He has criticized the Obama administration for its handling of the the Flint, Mich., water crisis, in which corroded pipes caused by a change in fresh water sources tainted the city’s drinking water with lead. The Obama administration had begun the process of revising the 1991 Lead and Copper Rule, proposing improvements such strengthening the standards for replacing old lead pipes...

DELAWARE

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL

Is climate change to blame for the slow arrival of snow geese? In recent years, snow geese have been arriving on Delmarva much later than usual. Experts say a variety of factors are to blame.

DELAWARE CAPE GAZETTE

Letter: Insufficient public transportation a problem in Sussex What do the Lewes Christmas Parade, the Rehoboth Christmas Parade, Rehoboth Holiday Farmers Market, the Milton Holiday Tree Lighting, Long Neck Christmas Fair, Lewes in Bloom Christmas Market, Milford Festival of Trees, Rehoboth Art League Holiday Open House, Zwaaanendal Holiday Bazaar, the Dagsboro Railroad Club all have in common? They all occur on Saturdays! Did you guess that? The other common factors are that they are all held in Sussex County, and they are not accessible by DART bus riders...

DELAWARE PUBLIC MEDIA (NPR)

Some Millsboro residents dissatisfied with drinking water contamination response Mountaire Farms is working with the state to offer Millsboro residents a solution for their contaminated wells, but some residents say they feel the solution isn't adequate enough. Residents near Mountaire Farms’ Millsboro plant received waivers Thursday asking them to sign off on a solution for their contaminated drinking water. Bob Phillips lives less than a half a mile from the fields where Mountaire sprayed contaminated wastewater. The Jersey Rd. resident was offered a water softener system the state says would provide more drinkable water. The system would discharge regenerated wastewater into his septic system. But Phillips says he’s worried about the consequences and cost if it doesn’t work, and says he won’t take it. "What they’re offering is not an answer to the problem. Our property values — it’s gotten out — it’s in the tank now," Phillips said. The waiver says he as the homeowner would agree to all costs associated with the system, even if something goes wrong. "It's going to be my responsibility," Phillips said. "Naturally, I'm not signing the waiver." Phillips’ well has nitrates above 26 milligrams per liter. Nitrates over 10 milligrams per liter is considered unsafe to drink. He says he wants a deeper well, or to be hooked up to the town’s water system. Besides the solution, Phillips said he's dissatisfied with

the communication. A week ago, he came home to two cases of water with a note from Sharp Water on his doorstep, that said they were delivering the water on behalf of Mountaire. On Monday, he and his family received three five-gallon jugs and a water cooler, but heard nothing from the company. They also received a letter detailing the water softener system and waiver he would need to sign, but there was no waiver attached. "I never had a problem in 20 years of living here, and boom all of a sudden," he said. "They're not talking to people, now they are." The state's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and Division of Public Health's Office of Drinking Water have tested 34 private wells near Mountaire's Millsboro plant, said Michael Globetti, a spokesman for DNREC. Of those 34, 21 have nitrates that are higher than the drinking water standard. Maria Payan, a consultant with the Socially Responsible Agricultural Project has met with 15 of those families, and says there's a consensus among them. "They're terrified," Payan said...

WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON GAZETTE-MAIL

Trump regulatory initiative targets black lung protections As part of a government-wide effort to eliminate regulations, the Trump administration indicated Thursday that the Labor Department would revisit a 3-year-old rule meant to reduce exposure to coal dust that causes deadly black lung disease. Plans for the re-examination of the rule were outlined in a new regulatory agenda published by the White House for the Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration. Titled, "Regulatory Reform of Existing Standards and Regulations: Retrospective Study of Respirable Coal Mine Dust Rule," the notice said MSHA would seek ways that the coal-dust rule "could be improved or made more effective or less burdensome." It said that goal is to accommodate "advances in technology, innovative techniques, or less costly methods," including whether the dust-control requirements "could be streamlined or replaced in frequency." MSHA also would be conducting a "retrospective review" of the rule that was finalized in 2014 to evaluate whether that rule "is achieving respirable dust levels to protect miners' health," the regulatory notice said. The agency would be seeking comment from the mining community and the public on its re-evaluation of the dust rule, the regulatory notice said. The Trump administration's moves come as researchers are increasingly concerned about a resurgence in lung disease among coal miners, especially in West Virginia and other Appalachian coal states. Black lung, or coal workers' pneumoconiosis, is the common name for a collection of debilitating and potentially fatal ailments caused by breathing coal dust. In 1969, when it passed landmark mine safety legislation, Congress made eliminating black lung a national goal, but between 1968 and 2014, more than 76,000 coal miners nationwide died from the disease...

BECKLEY REGISTER HERALD

Ordinance would allow county to go after assets of companies The Fayette County Commission will vote on a Public Nuisance Civil Investigation Ordinance at its regular meeting Friday. Fayette County Commission President Matthew Wender said the ordinance would give the county the ability to go after assets of companies that operated deep or surface mines prior to

when clean up regulations were put in place by the federal and state governments. “There are some situations across southern West Virginia where there is continuing seepage from some of these mines that are causing pollution and contamination in some of the waterways,” Wender said. The commission president pointed to Wolf Creek in Fayette County as a prime example but added that there are other areas of concern. While the pollution in Minden has been in the news recently, Wender said that the inspiration behind this particular ordinance took place before the renewed discovery of PCBs there. “There were conversations that were taking place and it appeared that the commission might be the vehicle through which this ordinance could get passed and put into place,” Wender said. While Minden may not have been the inspiration, Wender said that if it were discovered that PCBs were disposed of in a mine shaft, that the ordinance may allow the county to seek remediation funds if passed. “There is no way to pay for this remediation,” Wender said of harmful waste dumps prior to federal and state regulation. “It is remediation for which there are no bonds in place. The county sees this (ordinance) as an avenue to collect against some of the companies that have assets that we can go after so that we can remedy some of the environmental damages.” While the ordinance was inspired and developed by local environmental groups and other concerned citizens, Wender said that the commission has letters of concern from other parties including the oil and gas industry, a defense attorney group and a private law firm. “I don’t know if they are opposed to it in whole or just part of it,” Wender said. The Fayette County Commission meeting is set to begin at 9 a.m. with the ordinance hearing scheduled for 10:30 a.m.

MARYLAND

BALTIMORE SUN

How a trash incinerator — Baltimore's biggest polluter — became green energy A trash incinerator in Southwest Baltimore is the city’s largest single source of air pollution. But a state law has nonetheless allowed it to collect roughly \$10 million in subsidies over the past six years through a program intended to promote green energy. Few commuters who pass the imposing white smokestack on Interstate 95 have any idea that the plant burns their household waste, that their electric bills help to maintain it, or that it releases thousands of pounds of greenhouse gases and toxic substances — carbon dioxide, hydrochloric acid, formaldehyde among them — into the air every year. Wheelabrator Baltimore gets the subsidies because lawmakers agreed in 2011 to classify trash as one of the most environmentally friendly sources of renewable power, on par with wind energy. The waste-to-energy industry helped write the legislation that awarded it the coveted renewable label that qualifies incinerators for the subsidies. Maryland is one of fewer than a dozen states to reward trash-burning in the same way as it does windmills. Critics say that’s just one example of how Maryland’s renewable energy incentive program is like the federal tax code: It’s full of breaks and handouts that might have made sense at one time, but have now grown out of control. Some also question whether burning black liquor — a waste product from paper mills — should qualify as renewable energy eligible for money under the program. A paper mill in Western Maryland and others across the Southeastern United States have collected \$60 million dollars from Maryland’s electricity ratepayers. While there is broad support in Maryland and other states for building a clean and renewable energy supply, the debate shows disagreement over how to get there. Politicians generally support efforts to reduce

the fossil fuel emissions that are causing the climate to change. But they have been unable to come to a consensus on just what should be counted as green energy. State Del. Jeff Waldstreicher has sponsored legislation to stop rewarding renewable but dirty fuels and focus on truly green energy. “Each of these elements individually was well-intentioned when it was put in the renewable portfolio standard,” the Montgomery County Democrat says. “Cumulatively, we see it might not be as renewable as we originally thought.”...

SALISBURY DAILY TIMES

Commentary: We need to stop trying for major economic growth (By Tom Horton) My bike has but one speed, unfashionable in a high-g geared, tech-fueled world that now affords cyclists push-button shifting through a range of gears sufficient to conquer the Alps and pass Porsches. Single-speeding is limiting — but also liberating. It makes you respect the lay of the land, seek the gentler slopes that meander alongside the hills, value the wooded corridors that block headwinds. Your pedaling becomes more efficient, your legs stronger. There is more to the joy of bicycling than more gears, more mileage, higher speeds. The virtues of slow are especially relevant now to saving the Chesapeake Bay and the larger environment, as Congress debates major tax reforms based on a single, awful premise: We must grow the economy faster and bigger than ever. “We face a crushing burden of debt which will take down our economy,” House Speaker Paul Ryan said. But his tax plan will add an acknowledged \$1.5 trillion to \$2 trillion to national indebtedness. It’s the only way “to get faster economic growth,” Ryan said. And “faster economic growth is necessary for us to get our debt under control.” Never mind the circularity of that argument, or the fact that economists across the political spectrum think the level of growth Republicans are counting on is unachievable. The real dirty secret is that virtually no one on either side of the political aisle thinks that roaring faith-based growth would be undesirable; just unrealistic. But environmentally, such growth would be disastrous, as will be Congress’s all-out, desperate attempts to achieve it if the tax package passes with its present, pedal-to-the-metal economic expansionism — think repeal of regulations, fast-tracking fossil fuel energy projects, suppressing troublesome climate science. And what’s bad for the planet is bad for the Chesapeake, where a warming climate and sea level rise threaten wetlands, water quality and habitat. Plus, even under the best of circumstances we’re going to be hard-pressed to meet air and water quality goals by 2025...

CHESAPEAKE BAY JOURNAL

Bay water quality nears record high mark Officials see signs cleanup is working, but most of Chesapeake still short of goal. Water quality in a little more than 39 percent of the Chesapeake maintained levels good enough during the last three years to support Bay creatures, from worms to crabs to fish, figures released Thursday show. That was the second-best extent of good water quality seen in any three-year period since coordinated Chesapeake monitoring efforts began in 1985, according to the state-federal Bay Program partnership. From 2014 through last year, 39.2 percent of the Bay attained clean water standards for clarity, algae concentrations and dissolved oxygen. That was just below the record-best extent in 2008-2010, when 39.5 percent of the Chesapeake met cleanup goals. Officials said the numbers show that decades-long cleanup efforts have improved conditions in recent years, including a record-high abundance of underwater grasses, a key indicator of the estuary’s health. Still, Bay Program officials and environmental advocates alike noted that the latest figures show that 60 percent of the Bay falls short of water quality objectives. “While these improving trends are encouraging, we must ramp

up our efforts to implement pollution control measures to ensure progress toward 100 percent of the water-quality standards is achieved throughout the Bay and its tidal waters,” said Nick DiPasquale, director of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Bay Program Office. The water-quality standards are designed to ensure that Bay dwelling creatures — from bottom-dwelling worms to striped bass swimming along the surface — have enough oxygen to survive. They’re also intended to bring back clear water that would allow the recovery of the Bay’s once-vast underwater grass meadows, which provide habitat for juvenile fish and crabs and food for waterfowl. Meeting the standards would also curb growth of algae blooms that often plague the Bay, some of them harmful, even toxic, to fish and animals... The data suggest there has been a significant overall improvement in Bay water quality since monitoring efforts began in 1985. In the first three-year assessment from 1985-87, just 26.5 percent of the Chesapeake attained water quality standards. “Robust funding, science, and stewardship are paying off and cleaning up the Bay, but we still have a long way to go,” said Ben Grumbles, secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment.

Commentary: Bay jurisdictions’ no-action climate policy puts restoration in peril Despite research demonstrating that climate change is adding millions of pounds of nutrient pollution to the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan and his Bay states colleagues appear to be taking a page from the Trump playbook: Ignore this inconvenient truth. Doubts about whether climate change is caused by humans and threatens the planet are rapidly going the way of urban legend. Just ask any resident of Puerto Rico, the Gulf Coast or California how life was during the three consecutive hurricanes or the wildfires that have plagued them this summer and fall. Reliable scientific research shows climate change is also compounding pollution in the Chesapeake. Rainfall exacerbated by these dire developments could mean millions of additional pounds of nitrogen and significantly more phosphorus reaching the Bay every year that will put restoration out of reach by 2025... Failing to meaningfully address climate change in the Bay cleanup not only abrogates the states’ commitment in the Bay Agreement but also undermines the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s commitment under the Bay pollution diet, or Total Maximum Daily Load — in writing, at least — to incorporate climate change into the midpoint assessment. Maryland should be persuading Pennsylvania and other states to step up — on climate change *and* the Conowingo Dam. By signaling the lack of will and intent to address these pollution loads as soon as possible, Bay jurisdictions are ignoring what the experts know it will take to clean up the Bay. They are repudiating rigorous, peer-reviewed science and promoting a lighter — but no less significant — form of climate denialism, despite their approval of modeling that demonstrates the climate-related pollution rates; nor have they voiced any objections to its rigor. Hogan and Grumbles can still do something to ensure the jurisdictions don’t effectively kill the Bay cleanup, but they need to act with haste, before it’s too late.

If you see a sea turtle in the Chesapeake, consider yourself very lucky Sea turtles, large and lovable to their fans, have endured a long decline around the world and in the Chesapeake Bay. But a team of international scientists has delivered a bit of good news, at least on a global scale. The results of their study, published in the September issue of Science Advances, show that some species of sea turtles, after years of decline from harvesting practices and lost habitat, are beginning a modest rebound on a global basis. Whether or not that rebound extends to the Chesapeake remains to be seen. While the average, global population of sea turtles may be on the rise, the increase is not the same in all locations or for all species. The study, conducted by

Greek and Australian scientists, looked at 299 nesting surveys recorded over time periods of six to 47 years. While they found 95 significant increases, they also found 35 significant decreases and note that some species, like the leatherback turtles in the Eastern and Western Pacific, remain in decline. No studies currently target sea turtle populations in the Chesapeake Bay. Turtle advocates, though, including biologists like Ruth Boettcher, would like to see signs of improvement close to home...

CECIL WHIG

Stream restoration project begins in Fair Hill FAIR-HILL -- Work has started on an almost 5-acre tract of land off Gallaher Road to fix erosion and stormwater runoff issues that threaten the...

SOUTHERN MARYLAND NEWS

Suspect Charged for Making Bomb Threat at Power Plant The Prince George's County Police Department's Homeland Security Division charged a man for making a bomb threat against the Keys Energy Plant in Brandywine. The suspect is 22-year-old Raekwon Dixon of the 2900 block of Brinkley Road in Temple Hills. Dixon is an employee of a construction company currently building the power plant. On December 8th, at approximately 7:30 pm, a bomb threat was reported at the facility on North Keys Road. Plant management ordered an evacuation. A search of the facility recovered no explosives. Investigators with the PGPD's Homeland Security Division and members of the Arson/Bomb Task Force opened an investigation into the origin of the threat. The task force is comprised of PGPD officers and members of the Prince George's County Fire Department...

VIRGINIA

RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

Northam announces Cabinet picks for Natural Resources, Agriculture and Forestry Gov.-elect Ralph Northam has named one of his former legislative aides, currently a senior adviser to a key congressional committee, as Virginia's next secretary of Natural Resources, one of two Cabinet picks announced Thursday. The selection was also one watched closely by environmental groups who want a change of tack under the new administration on some major issues such as coal-ash cleanup and the planned construction of a pair of natural gas pipelines through the state...

Atlantic Coast Pipeline gets another approval The National Park Service has given the Dominion Energy-led Atlantic Coast Pipeline another key approval, authorizing construction and operation of the pipeline under the Blue Ridge Parkway. The service has issued construction and right of way permits for the crossing, concluding it "is consistent with the long-term conservation of scenery, wildlife and cultural resources under the agency's care," Dominion said in a statement...

AUGUSTA FREE PRESS

Water quality in Chesapeake Bay approaches record high The Chesapeake Bay Program announced today that estimated water quality in the tidal Chesapeake Bay has reached a near-

record high. According to preliminary data, almost 40 percent of the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries met clean water standards for clarity, oxygen and algae growth between 2014 and 2016. This two percent increase from the previous assessment period is due in large part to a rise in dissolved oxygen in the deep channel of the Bay. While this positive sign of resiliency in the nation's largest estuary indicates our ecosystem has recovered from the damages sustained during Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, water quality must improve in 60 percent of the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries if the estuary is to function as a healthy ecosystem. Local efforts to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution have shown some success under the Chesapeake Bay's "pollution diet," but the challenge of putting enough conservation practices on the ground to further reduce agricultural runoff and urban runoff to local waterways remains. The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership uses several environmental indicators to track pollution and assess aquatic health. A suite of computer simulations called the Watershed Model is used to estimate the impact that local conservation and best management practices have had on nutrient and sediment loads. Monitoring data collected from stations on the nine largest rivers in the watershed provide the foundation for experts to estimate the total nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment entering the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries each year, while data collected from stations in non-tidal waters allow experts to assess the aquatic response to efforts to reduce agricultural and urban runoff. Additionally, monitoring data is also collected from a comprehensive network of hundreds of stations in tidal waters to assess changes in water quality...

CBS 19 CHARLOTTESVILLE

Pipeline opponent reacts to water certification vote CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (CBS19 NEWS) -- Regulators on the Virginia State Water Control Board approved water certifications for the controversial Atlantic Coast Pipeline by a 4-3 vote. However, the certifications are pending the completion of more studies by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. At the meeting Tuesday, there was a noticeable police presence and some protesters were escorted out after disrupting the meeting. Ernie Reed, a member of the group Friends of Nelson that is an opponent of the pipeline, says this decision will encourage the state to continue reviewing the pipeline's impact. "It's very positive. It shows that the momentum is now working in the opposite direction for the state to stand up and say they are actually going to do their job and wait until these reports are in to look at them," he said. Pipeline opponents are concerned about the potential impacts it could have on the environment. "The protective measures we've put in place and the regulatory oversight we're receiving should assure all Virginians that the pipeline will be built safely and in a way that preserves the state's water quality," responded a Dominion Energy spokesperson in a statement. At this time, there is no word on when a final decision will be made regarding the project.

STAUNTON NEWS LEADER

National Park Service approves pipeline construction WAYNESBORO - The Atlantic Coast Pipeline has received the OK from the National Park Service to be constructed underneath the Blue Ridge Parkway. According to a release from Dominion Energy Thursday, the National Park Service approved the pipeline's construction, but there's still numerous contingencies on the project. The news comes just days after a panel of Virginia regulators granted a conditional permit for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline contingent on getting more information about the project's water quality impacts. The Virginia State Water Control Board voted 4-3 Tuesday, Dec.

12 to approve a key Clean Water Act permit. The board is charged with determining whether there is "reasonable assurance" water along the route won't be contaminated during construction. Now, the National Park Service has given authorization for the construction and operation of the pipeline underneath the Blue Ridge Parkway. "After more than three years of exhaustive study, this week the National Park Service issued Construction and Right of Way permits for the Blue Ridge Parkway crossing," said Aaron Ruby, Dominion Energy spokesman, in a release. "The agency concluded that the crossing is consistent with the long-term conservation of scenery, wildlife and cultural resources under the agency's care. The agency's approval was reached after more than three years of careful study and meaningful engagement with the public and other agencies." In constructing the pipeline, Dominion said it would use the "most protective crossing method," which would avoid surface impacts and preserve views. That would be done using a technique known as a Horizontal Directional Drill, a release said, and the pipeline would be installed through a tunnel 800 feet below the parkway. "This ensures that construction and operation of the pipeline will have no impact on the public use or enjoyment of the parkway," Ruby said in a release. "We've always believed it's important to balance the energy needs of consumers with the preservation of cultural resources. The park service's approval shows that through collaboration with agencies, we can responsibly develop infrastructure while preserving cultural resources for the enjoyment of future generations."..._

MISCELLANEOUS

BNA DAILY ENVIRONMENT REPORT

Senate Gives EPA Water Office a Permanent Leader The Trump administration's pick to be the country's top water quality regulator has won Senate confirmation. The Senate in a Dec. 14 voice vote confirmed David Ross to lead the Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water, which has jurisdiction over oceans, rivers, lakes, tap water, and other areas. He will be the first permanent leader the office has had since 2014, as the Obama administration's nominee, Ken Kopocis, was never confirmed.

Ross was most recently the top environmental official in the office of the Wisconsin attorney general. He will lead the agency's rewrite of its Waters of the United States rule, which redefines the bodies of water that fall under federal anti-pollution jurisdiction. He will also be in charge of the agency's ongoing response to the Flint, Mich., lead contamination crisis. The Senate also confirmed, by voice vote, Matt Leopold to be the agency's general counsel. He served as the general counsel to Florida's Department of Environmental Protection from 2013 to 2015 under Republican Gov. Rick Scott. Leopold also is a former Justice Department environmental attorney, whose resume includes work on the civil trial team for the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Leopold will lead the EPA's legal team as it works to secure the legal underpinning for repealing, replacing, and rewriting Obama-era climate, water, and air policies. Most recently, he worked as a partner in Carlton Fields Jorden Burt's Tallahassee, Fla., office.

The Environment and Public Works Committee approved both nominations by voice vote Oct. 25.

Who's Next, With Embattled EPA Toxics Nominee Dourson Out? Wanted: Someone to run the EPA Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention with a history of leadership on chemicals, toxic substances or pesticides. Individuals with baggage need not apply. The Trump administration is on the lookout for a new pick to head the Environmental Protection Agency chemical safety office after its first nominee, toxicologist Michael Dourson, withdrew his name from consideration Dec. 13 as criticism mounted about his work with the chemical industry. Dourson, who served as an adviser at the EPA as he awaited Senate confirmation, was previously head of the nonprofit Toxicology Excellence for Risk Assessment at the University of Cincinnati, which analyzed the risk of several chemicals for local and state governments...

Trump to Tackle Air Permitting Changes, Delay Lead Regulation The Trump administration highlighted the moves it made to cut regulations, but it also has delayed putting into effect many federal agencies' planned environmental policies, including initiatives on lead in drinking water and chemical plant safety.

EPA Urges Supreme Court to Reject Review of Wastewater Policies The U.S. Supreme Court shouldn't review an EPA decision that limits an appellate ruling on a wastewater management practice to just the seven states within that court's jurisdiction, the Justice Department argued.

N.Y. Will Sue EPA If Hudson River PCB Dredging Deemed Done New York State says it's prepared to withdraw from the 2002 Record of Decision that has guided the Hudson River polychlorinated biphenyls dredging if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency deems the cleanup as "complete," Attorney General Eric Schneiderman (D) said in a Dec. 14 statement with Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D). The state says General Electric Co. filed a request for a Certificate of Completion on Dec. 23, 2016, and that the EPA has 365 days to respond to the request...

GREENWIRE

Clean Water Rule: 4 small words may hamstring Trump team's WOTUS overhaul The Trump administration might have unwittingly cleared a path for a legal assault in its proposal for delaying the effective date of the contentious 2015 Clean Water Rule, experts in administrative law say. At issue are four words in the proposal released last month by U.S. EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers aimed at delaying by two years the Obama rule defining which wetlands and waterways get protection under the Clean Water Act. The administration said it intended to "provide clarity and consistency" to the rule, also known as Waters of the U.S., or WOTUS, rule, but the proposal it sent to the *Federal Register* and the one that was ultimately published don't match. The first version says the agencies want to "amend the effective date" of the rule, while the published version says they want to "add an applicability date." An EPA source said the phrase "applicability date" was put into the proposal after the *Federal Register* insisted a new term was needed because the Clean Water Rule had already taken effect in August 2015. So what's the big deal? Legal experts say the word change could make the administration's position

more vulnerable to lawsuits.

EPA: Pruitt's Morocco trip cost nearly \$40,000 — employee U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's trip to Morocco this week promoting liquefied natural gas cost nearly \$40,000, according to an EPA employee with knowledge of Pruitt's travel expenses. That cost did not include salary and overtime pay for the security detail Pruitt travels with, said the employee, who spoke to the Associated Press on the condition of anonymity. Pruitt was in the North African kingdom to pitch American gas exports, drawing fire from Democrats and environmentalists who say the trip had nothing to do with EPA's mission of protecting clean air and water (*Greenwire*, Dec. 13). EPA's inspector general is already investigating the administrator's spending on taxpayer-funded travel and a \$25,000 soundproof booth he had installed at EPA headquarters earlier this year. Pruitt's accommodations, airfare and other costs for the Morocco visit reached over \$17,000, compared with Samantha Dravis, his chief policy adviser, whose expenses totaled just under \$4,000 for the four-day trip. EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox did not answer questions yesterday about why costs for Pruitt were so much higher than for other employees. For environmentalists, the trip is yet another target on Pruitt's record. "The EPA administrator's job is to protect the health of the public and the environment, but Scott Pruitt instead acts like he is a globe-trotting salesman for the fossil fuel industry who can make taxpayers foot the bill," Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune said yesterday (Michael Biesecker, *Associated Press*, Dec. 13). — **NS**

E-waste last year equaled 4,500 Eiffel Towers — study Electronic waste soared to an all-time high last year, sending valuable metals to the trash, according to a United Nations-backed study released yesterday. E-waste reached about 45 million metric tons in 2016, according to the joint study by the U.N. University, International Telecommunication Union and International Solid Waste Association. That's an 8 percent increase from the 41 million metric tons recorded in 2014 — and roughly equivalent to the weight of 4,500 Eiffel Towers, the study said. The value of the raw materials in the scrap, including metals such as gold and copper, was estimated at \$64.6 billion. And with 8.9 million metric tons of e-waste recorded as recycled, most of those materials went to waste. E-waste is defined as any trashed item with a battery or plug. It includes devices such as televisions and cellphones. The study attributed a lack of recycling to rising incomes and declining prices for everything from refrigerators to solar panels. Ruediger Kuehr, head of the U.N. University's Sustainable Cycles Program, urged holiday shoppers to be mindful of recycling when selecting presents.

EPA: Behind the doomed effort to defend, promote Dourson U.S. EPA and President Trump's pick for the agency's top chemical safety post, Michael Dourson, sought to tightly control information about the nominee and quickly rebut unflattering news reports about him, according to emails obtained by E&E News under the Ohio Public Records Act. The effort fell short. Dourson withdrew from consideration for the position yesterday amid bipartisan concerns about his background. He continues to advise EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. The communications centered on a Sept. 20 article by Associated Press reporters Michael Biesecker and Jeff Horwitz — "EPA nominee once helped chemical industry, lobbyists" — that detailed Dourson's work criticizing studies that raised concerns about the safety of products sold by clients of his nonprofit firm. "Please let me know if you have specific responses/push backs to this article," EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman wrote to Dourson that afternoon. "And please especially note

any falsehoods or inaccuracies."Interior: Survey finds widespread harassment across department More than one-third of Interior Department employees surveyed report having been harassed or discriminated against over the past year, a sobering new report shows...

NEW YORK TIMES

How Global Warming Fueled Five Extreme Weather Events Extreme weather left its mark across the planet in 2016, the hottest year in recorded history. Record heat baked Asia and the Arctic. Droughts gripped Brazil and southern Africa. The Great Barrier Reef suffered its worst bleaching event in memory, killing large swaths of coral. Now climate scientists are starting to tease out which of last year's calamities can, and can't, be linked to global warming. In a new collection of papers published Wednesday in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, researchers around the world analyzed 27 extreme weather events from 2016 and found that human-caused climate change was a "significant driver" for 21 of them. The effort is part of the growing field of climate change attribution, which explores connections between warming and weather events that have already happened. To judge whether global warming made a particular extreme weather event more likely to occur, scientists typically compare data from the real world, where rising greenhouse gases have heated the planet over the past century, against a modeled counterfactual world without those rising emissions. This technique has gained broader acceptance among climate scientists in the last decade. Here are five extreme weather events from 2016 that scientists now think were made more likely by global warming:

Trump Says His Regulatory Rollback Already Is the 'Most Far-Reaching' WASHINGTON — President Trump on Thursday said his administration was answering "a call to action" by rolling back regulations on environmental protections, health care, financial services and other industries as he made a push to showcase his accomplishments near the end of his first year in office. The remarks highlighted an area where Mr. Trump has perhaps done more to change the policies of his predecessor than any other, with regulatory shifts that have affected wide swaths of the economy. "We are just getting started," Mr. Trump said, speaking from the Roosevelt Room of the White House. He described progress so far as the "most far-reaching regulatory reform" in United States history, a claim he did not back up. "We have decades of excess regulation to remove," he added. "To help launch the next phase of growth, prosperity and freedom, I am challenging my cabinet to find and remove every single outdated, unlawful and excessive regulation on the books." Echoing his days as a real estate developer with the flair of a ground breaking, Mr. Trump used an oversized pair of scissors to cut a ribbon his staff had set up in front of two piles of paper, representing government regulations in 1960, (20,000 pages, he said), and today — a pile that was about six feet tall (said to be 185,000 pages). His efforts have brought cheers from the business community, most notably from companies that will benefit from the rollbacks. But they have also generated fierce pushback from state attorneys general and environmental groups who say that pulling back regulations has left the environment more vulnerable to pollution and consumers with fewer of the protections that were adopted after the financial crisis. The president said that for every new regulation adopted, his administration has killed 22, a claim that some experts in regulation said was difficult to verify, but which he said was far more than the two rules killed for each new one that he pledged earlier this year. The president also said little about the impact of his actions, which have created opportunities for regulated industries that supported his campaign — and that in many cases have played a direct a role in orchestrating the changes through their lobbying efforts.

LA TIMES

Study: Proximity to Pa. fracking wells linked to lower birth weight After combing through a decade's worth of Pennsylvania birth records, researchers have found that pregnant women living within two-thirds of a mile of a hydraulic fracturing well were 25 percent more likely to give birth to a worryingly small infant than were women who lived at least 10 miles outside that zone during pregnancy. Over these babies' lifetimes, their low birth weights raise the likelihood they will suffer poorer health and lower achievement, including reduced earnings and educational attainment. The authors of the new research estimated that 29,000 of the close to 4 million annual births in the United States – roughly 0.7 percent of babies born each year — were to women who lived within about two-thirds of a mile of a hydraulic fracturing operation during their pregnancies. The study was published Wednesday in the journal Science Advances. Nationally, the advent and expansion of hydraulic fracturing operations have reduced gasoline prices, decreased some air pollution emissions and driven down U.S. dependence on foreign oil. But in areas surrounding the nation's roughly 1.2 million fracking wells, the extraction technique has increased pollution of air, soil, groundwater and surface water. Toxins: Many of the toxic chemicals used in the hydraulic fracturing process are known carcinogens. Toxic gases, including benzene, are released from the rock by fracking. And the high-pressure pumping of a slurry of chemical into the ground is widely thought to release toxins and irritants into nearby air and water. The noise and pollution emitted by trucks and heavy machinery also may affect the health of people living nearby...

REUTERS NEWS SERVICE

EPA seeks input to rework rule on lead in drinking water The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said on Thursday it will seek input from state and local officials as it considers how to rework a 1991 rule meant to protect people from lead and copper contamination in drinking water. The agency invited state officials to give input on revising the Lead and Copper rule at a two-hour meeting on Jan. 8 at the EPA's headquarters in Washington. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said the agency is seeking the input to "properly address lead and ensure communities have access to safe drinking water." The move is part of the Trump administration's policy of consulting with state and local officials, or national organizations that represent them, when developing regulations. While the administration is focused on reducing regulations on mining and drilling and other industries, Pruitt says he is focusing on what he calls the core duties of the EPA, which includes water pollution. The EPA is considering long-term and short-term revisions to the rule including replacement of lead pipes, improving corrosion control treatment requirements, and the role of filters where water is consumed. Lead is a neurotoxin that can damage brains and cause behavior and stomach problems. There is no safe level of lead in drinking water and children are particularly vulnerable, the Centers for Disease Control says. Lead poisoning in drinking water became a national issue in Flint, Michigan beginning in 2014. But high levels of lead have also been found in the blood of children in other cities including New York. Drinking water is primarily contaminated by corroding water lines and plumbing materials used in the home. The EPA sent a letter to the Environmental Council of States, the Council of State Governments, the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and other groups inviting them to participate in the January meeting. The agency said other groups and the public will have opportunities to comment on the rulemaking process...

